"...Péron's party were much troubled with the thefts committed by the natives. In describing an interview with fourteen savages, he says (ch. xiii. p. 279): 'M. Rouget, to whom we had confided the musket, placed it by his side, keeping it, however, well in view, for fear that some aboriginal would snatch it up and flee with it into the forest; a sort of conduct, with which, with other objects, we had had some experience of in the Channel [D'Entrecasteaux].' We may here mention in parenthesis that there are very few cases of theft brought against the aborigines, as Davies says: 'They do not appear given to pilfering, although instances have occurred.' From this time forth all friendly intercourse between the natives and the Frenchmen was at an end, [59] for, after describing a long, and so far very friendly interview, with fourteen male aborigines, Péron narrates how the sight of a little boat belonging to his [Péron's] vessels, cruising off the shore, threw them into a state of angry terror, in which he had the greatest difficulty to pacify them and to induce them to lay aside their arms. 'Gradually they appeared to become bolder, they spoke among themselves in an excited way; when they looked at us, their expression was gloomier and more savage than it had previously been; they appeared to meditate some violence, but the musket of M. Rouget seemed to restrain them, whether from curiosity or treachery, they worried him every minute to begin shooting the birds in the neighbouring trees, but we judged our position too critical to comply with their request. Their audacity grew with their defiance. One of them wanted my

waistcoat, the bright colours of which had attracted his attention. He had already several times demanded it of me, but I had so positively refused that I did not think he would return to the charge. However, one minute, when I was not paying attention, he seized hold of me by the waistcoat and pointed his spear at me, brandishing it furiously. I pretended to take his threats as a joke, but seizing the point of the lance, turned it aside, and showing him M. Rouget, who had just aimed at him, I said this single word in his language mata (dead); he understood me, and deposited his weapon with the same indifference as if no hostile demonstration against me had escaped him. I had hardly escaped this danger, when I found myself threatened, if not perilously, at least as disagreeably. One of the large gold earrings which I wore excited the desires of another savage, who, without saying anything, slid behind me, cunningly slipped his finger through the ring, and tugged so hard that he would undoubtedly have torn my ear had not the clasp given way. It must be remembered that all these men had been loaded with presents by us; that we had given them mirrors, knives, coloured glass beads, pearls, handkerchiefs, snuff boxes, etc.; that I had stripped myself of nearly all the buttons on my coat, which, being gilt copper, had seemed specially valuable to them on account of their brightness. Further,, it must be recollected that we had lent ourselves to all their desires and caprices, without asking anything in return for our presents, and then one can judge how unjust

and treacherous their conduct towards us was. I can, indeed, positively assert, that, but for M. Rouget and his scarecrow, M. Petit and I should have fallen victims to these fierce men. I must frankly declare that their actions were of such a [60] treacherous and savage nature as quite to shock both myself and my companions; and remembering what had happened to several of our companions in the channel, we came to the conclusion that it was necessary to appear among these people with the means to restrain their ill will or to repulse their attacks. Before leaving, I thought it advisable to bestow upon them fresh evidences of our goodwill: hence I approached the old man, took him affectionately by the hand, gave him a glass bottle, a knife, two gilt buttons, a white handkerchief, etc. The old man seemed the more pleased with these last gifts from the fact of our being about to leave him; he smiled with a contented air, mixed, however, still with something uneasy and savage. Meanwhile M. Petit, who wished to possess a spear, had bought one for a mirror. I myself desired to have a club, and I had already procured one, when the savages, thinking better of it, suddenly seized their weapons afresh, and uttering loud cries all together, they menaced us in such a threatening manner, that M. Rouget, in order to restrain them, was obliged to shout loudly, at the same time taking aim at the one who had shown himself the most furious against me. After this last show of violence there was not a moment to lose in regaining the shore; but fearing that these savages would overwhelm us with stones or spears during our retreat, as they had done

already several times in the channel, we decided to retire very slowly, M. Petit and I walking in front, while M. Rouget followed behind with his musket. These precautions were successful, and we regained the boat without accident. I have thought it proper to give the principal details of this long and perilous interview in order to enable the reader to rightly judge of the extent of the difficulties which arise when travellers communicate with savage races, and how impossible it is to triumph over their natural ferocity and their prejudices against us' (ch. xiii. pp. 283-287)."